R.B. PFEIFFER (719-593-5[illegible]

September 22, 1992

Dear Mom and Dad,

Needless to say after our phone conversation I have been thinking a great deal about how best to respond to the NAMBLA charges.

This morning I will put a call into one of my friends at GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) in an attempt to dig up some facts that will prove useful in your rebuttal letter. NAMBLA is a disturbing and upsetting issue to most gays and lesbians, and one we would rather ignore than face. Last night and this morning, I have been thinking how I would respond to such charges and the result is the letter you are now reading.

I would not get into a heavy discussion of first amendment rights or defending the gay community's response to NAMBLA, which many within the community view as weak and ineffective. My primary response would be clear, direct and blunt: Do not stereotype the group based on the actions of a few. NAMBLA is a small, shadowy organization that most gays and lesbians know little about, or even consider part of the gay community.

Pedophilia is pedophilia; it is not homosexual or heterosexual. To condemn the entire gay community with the ideas and actions of NAMBLA is the same as condemning the entire Catholic Church for a few of its pedophile priest, or to condemn the entire African-American community because a tiny, fringe element advocates the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. I would also note that NAMBLA has its straight counterparts, reiterating that the majority of the pedophiles in the United States are straight males.

It is time to stop the stereotyping. Gay men are not child molesters anymore than Hispanics are "drunk Mexicans" and African Americans are "intellectually inferior" and women are "too emotional and inherently unstable" and overweight people are all lazy, and that all Christians support and encourage the Traditional Values Coalition.

The real damage of stereotyping is that the majority of the people are wiped out, cease to exist, because someone is too lazy and ill-informed to grasp the wonderful complexity and beauty of life. Gay men and lesbians are good and decent people. They play chess, they play football, they are Republicans, Democrats, doctors and plumbers, and they want and will fight to be part of a family, to be part of America. They are not fighting for special privileges. They desire basic rights—the right to housing, to a job, the right to walk down the street and not to be called "faggot" or "dike," not to be threatened with the violence that increasingly claims the lives of more and more gay people each year.

Stereotyping exists because the majority fears and misunderstands the minority. In its brutal and cruel attacks, the religious right has failed in the most basic of Christian tenets: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Corinthians 13).

Stereotyping is the product of a small mind, of an immature, childlike mind. It is much more difficult to think for oneself, to put oneself in the shoes of a young gay man or lesbian living in Colorado Springs, who have never even heard of NAMBLA, but who worry about what will happen to their lives if Amendment Two passes, whether they will lose what security and family they have managed to precariously build.

Understanding the gay community does not mean reading the literature of NAMBLA and seeing all gays as pedophiles. It does not mean watching pictures of San Francisco's gay freedom day parade. It means hiking with the gay Sierrans, attending a gay AA meeting, and talking with parents and friends of gays. It means going into the homes of gays and lesbians and judging their lives for oneself, not based on what an angry priest espouses from the pulpit, not what you read in your religious newsletter, not what you fear and imagine (which is always much worse than reality). It means meeting and talking with your "enemies." Genuine dialogue is the bane of any stereotype.

America has a long and bountiful history of cultivating and securing the individual, of Emerson and Thoreau, but stereotyping destroys the individual, making him or her a part of a single soulless mass. It is inherently anti-democratic, the product of the worst of totalitarian governments.

It is time we listened to gay people. They are telling us they are losing their jobs, their apartments, their families. They are telling us they are frightened but also angry—that when attacked they will fight back.

Perhaps because of its boundless scenery, its western heritage, Colorado has long respected the will and wishes of the individual . But no one, gay or straight, can survive in a hostile environment that is desperately trying to demonize their humanity, trying hard not to hear their words, not to see them for who they are: people.

One final note: Don't let the religious right define the issues, do not let them drag you down. An argument focusing on NAMBLA is an argument already lost. It is what all the best freedom fighters have discovered early on. Fear and pessimism and evil cannot be ignored, but it is also infectious. Too much time spent in its midst will only cloud the intellect and damage the soul. Keep the best of the gay community

in your sight and make the rest of Colorado rise to your vision.

Eric Pfeiffer
Oakland, CA